THE HORRIBLE PERSECUTION OF THE French Proteſtants In the *PROVINCE* of POITOU.

Truly ſet forth by a Gentleman of great Quality, an Eye Witneſs of thoſe ſad Paſſages.

In a Letter *to a Worthy Friend of his at* Canterbury, June 26, *S.N.* 1681.

My Dear Couſin,

THe good Air of *France* which I find to conduce much to my health, and the deſire to ſee once more the goodly Countreys of the *South*, made me travel as far as *Poitou*, where I have much acquaintance of the beſt ſort. Here I was ſtay'd by the horrible Tragedy which is now acting in this Province, to deſtroy the Proteſtant Religion, and the Profeſſors thereof, of the middle ſort, which in theſe parts are very numerous. My Heart is ſo full of it, that I muſt tell you what I have ſeen.

The great Actor in it is one *Intendant Marillac*, who having from the potent Jeſuit Father *Le Cheſe*, the promiſes of the preſent Life, and not caring for thoſe of the Life to come, hath laid upon the Reformed a moſt heavy Croſs, ſuch as was not known ſince the Reformation. For which he hath got about him a Choice of Hard-hearted Villains, expert to do Miſchief to good Men, Indicting ſome of Crimes, ſuing others for Debts, loading all with Taxes. Thoſe hungry Oppreſſors are made Juſtices, that they may raven and tear by Authority.

They are ſearching into the Lives of Proteſtants: If any of them twenty years before hath ſpoken ſome offenſive Word, or given a Blow, there goeth out a Decree againſt him. He is Impriſoned in a dark Den, none of his Friends are ſuffered to come near him. He is put to a moſt refined kind of Inquiſition; For though all his Friends be kept from him, he hath every day two ſorts of Viſiters; Some ſeemingly kind and merciful, promiſe him Goods and Advantages of the World, if he will but go to Maſs. Some ſeverely telling him of the King's Abſolute Will, that there be but one Religion in his Kingdom: That if he remain obſtinate in the Hereſie, there is no mercy for him, he muſt look for the total Ruin of himſelf and his Family, after he hath been many Years ſuffering under the Condition of a Gally-Slave. Projects of ſevere Sentences are given him to read, that he may ſee what a weight of Diſtreſs is hanging over his Head, ready to fall on him and cruſh him. If theſe Arts ſhake not his Conſtancy, he is left in his dark Den, where he hath Bread allowed him, but hardly enough to live.

Others are ſued for their Debts, which are made to ſwell into fearful exceſſes of Coſts: The Creditor is never to be found when the Debtor hath got money to pay him, whilſt the poor Debtor is vexed with all the ſevere ways of the Law for not paying. The Lands of Debtors are extended for Debts, and themſelves put out of their Houſes. Among thoſe Exceſſes, they are haunted with evil Counſellors, offering to ſee the Debts paid, if they will forſake their Religion, the only way for them to be happy.

Another Perſecution of the Proteſtants is by Taxes, ſo heavy that they ſink under the Burthen. Thoſe Taxes are Arbitrary, ſo that the taxed perſons never know what they muſt pay till it be demanded: And the Proteſtants whom they have made Collectors, are impriſoned for not being able to pay for others, whom they had no power to diſtrain.

Some of the Raskally ſort of Tradeſmen will turn Papiſts, and then they will ſet a higher Rate upon their Work; but though they were diſliked as ill Workmen, when they are not employed by the Proteſtants, they will complain to the Juſtices, who thereupon lay Mulcts upon thoſe that will not employ them.

Finally, when all other tricks to pick Quarrels with Proteſtants are wanting, the laſt and certain way to undo them is uſed, which is to ſet Souldiers upon them. There are in *Poitou* four Troops of Horſe, who take Free Quarter in Proteſtants Houſes, and uſe them as Enemies. Their Salute when they come in, is to curſe and revile the Maſter and all his Houſhold, with the baſeſt Language. Anſwerably to that beginning they do their worſt to conſume and ſpoil the Goods of the Houſe, till they have ruin'd the Owners. Their way to bring them to Church, is to drag them tied with Cords to their Horſes, and cudgel them beſides, to make them go. Neither do they make an end of their horrible Violences, till they have made the Owners abandon their Houſes and Goods, or till they have made them turn Catholicks.

For an increaſe of Cruelty, thoſe Violences are done when men are preparing for their Harveſt, which the Souldiers deſtroy. Do but imagine what Souldiers will do, when they are commanded to do all the harm they can; and what an Harveſt of Tears and Lamentations they leave to poor Families, when they have deſtroyed the Harveſt of their Corn.

To theſe Cries and Lamentations of perſons perſecuted for the Goſpel, ſome are the more bitter Cries of others brought to the Brink of Deſpair by their Abjuration of Gods Truth to ſave their Eſtates. Which criminous Act they now openly deteſt with a Flood of Tears. Between theſe two ſorts of Weepers, a Voice of Lamentation and bitter Weeping is heard in *Poitou*, as once in *Rama*: And the reſt of the Text alluded unto, will ſhortly be for them and all the Proteſtants of *France*; *Rachel Weeping for her Children, and would not be comforted becauſe they are not*, when the great declared Deſign ſhall be put to farther execution, the getting of all the Children under Age from Proteſtant Parents. They have gotten too many of them already; and for the keeping of them, they exact ſuch heavy Penſions from the Parents, that nothing remains to them, but their Hands to get a poor Living.

Notwithſtanding all this hard uſage, I ſee the generality of the Proteſtants reſolved to undergo the diſmalleſt Tryals, as the Gallows, and the Fire, that they may Seal with their Blood the Truth of their Glorious Redeemer. As theſe Perſecutions on the one ſide fright Chriſtians, on the other ſide they confirm them, putting them in mind, that Sufferings are the Livery of a Chriſtian.

That which is moſt happy for the Proteſtant Party, is, that they are not accuſed of any Crime, and that never Subjects ſerved their King better, or were more ſubjected to his Will: Wherefore their Enemies durſt not accuſe them of any Violation of their Duty to the King: And they have this Comfort, that they ſuffer merely for Righteouſneſs ſake.

So they deal now with the ignoble or little Gentlemen. The Turn of the Great Men, among whom he that writ this Letter liveth, is not yet come; but they are in part undone by the undoing of their Tenants.

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